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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001057

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SUBJECT: TURKISH GENERALS SPEAK OUT ON MIDDLE EAST

Classified By: Pol-Mil Counselor Carl Siebentritt, Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary: At a June 5-6 symposium on the Middle East in Istanbul organized by the Turkish General Staff's (TGS) Strategic Studies Research Center, TGS Chief General Buyukanit provided a pessimistic outlook on the Middle East in remarks characterized by implicit criticism of the West. Buyukanit stated that Iraq is the country of greatest concern to Turkey, and expressed fears that religious and sectarian fragmentation there poses a threat to Turkey's stability. Buyukanit also expressed concern about Iran's nuclear program and voiced support for the government's ongoing mediation effort between Israel and Syria. Buyukanit stressed that progress in Iraq and a peace deal between Israel and Palestine are key to resolving all other Middle East issues. Turkish Land Forces Commander General Basbug, who is expected to succeed Buyukanit as CHOD in August, publicly acknowledged that Turkish forces have coordinated their anti-PKK strikes with Iran. Basbug also endorsed Kurdish language television programming under consideration in parliament -- a first from a senior military official. A Buyukanit aide told Emboff attending the conference that the CHOD's not-so-subtle jibes were not directed at the U.S., but rather at the Europeans and Iraqi Kurdish authorities. End Summary

Iraq/PKK

12. (SBU) Buyukanit characterized Iraq as the country of greatest concern for Turkey in the region. Noting the continued lack of security and stability, Buyukanit said Iraqi groups are pursuing sectarian and factional interests to the detriment of Iraq's national interests. He argued that clashes among ethnic groups in the Middle East did not exist during the Ottoman Empire and only emerged following World War I, implicitly blaming Western powers for the current ills in the Middle East. Buyukanit stressed that the dysfunctional federal structure in Iraq could further divide the country along ethnic lines and cause new clashes in the Middle East. He predicted that "if the current Iraqi structure were to continue unchanged, Iraq would be a center of instability that could possibly pose a threat to Turkey's security."

¶3. (U) Claiming that PKK terrorists are now using "fleets of trucks" instead of mule teams for transportation, Buyukanit implicitly accused the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) of duplicity: claiming to act against the PKK while allowing the group to truck supplies through KRG territory unhindered. Buyukanit also highlighted the flow of arms in the region as a challenge, criticizing the lack of a "sensitive approach" to the issue on the part of (unnamed) arms exporting countries.

Iran

¶4. (U) While expressing concern about Iran,s nuclear activities, Buyukanit appeared to call into question the current intelligence related to Iran, noting, "Not only today, but in the past as well, the concept of the threat has been manipulated." At the same time, Buyukanit urged Iran to "pursue a commonsense policy and work towards keeping the region free of nuclear capabilities."

Syria, Israel, and Palestine

¶5. (U) Buyukanit labeled the talks between Syria and Israel being facilitated by Turkey "an important development." Characterizing Syria as a key country in the Middle East peace process, Buyukanit said that Syria must be integrated into the international community. Buyukanit also highlighted the "Israel-Palestine problem" as the most important issue

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for the region.

¶6. (U) In the context of discussing terrorist threats in the region, Buyukanit reportedly labeled Hamas, Hezbollah, and Muslim Brotherhood as terrorist organizations, saying, "The situation in the region provides an environment for terrorist organizations, primarily the PKK, to prosper. Organizations such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Muslim Brotherhood find the opportunity to survive." He also compared Turkey,s struggle against the PKK with Israel,s fight with Hamas: "There are similar points between the PKK problem and the struggle that has been carried out on Israeli territory. Although Israel controls all the ports, missiles still enter the country."

¶7. (U) Despite presenting the Middle East as an area of instability, rife with problems whose resolution seems unlikely, Buyukanit expressed confidence in Turkey,s position in the region, calling Turkey a role model for the Middle East and a key actor in the region.

Blaming "External Influences" for Domestic Tensions

¶8. (U) Buyukanit rejected efforts to label Turkey as a "moderate Muslim" country, stressing that Turkey is a secular, democratic independent state, and that "secular Turkey is the only model." Responding to a question, Buyukanit rhetorically asked whether one should call the U.S. a "moderate Christian" nation. Buyukanit appeared to blame the EU for the current domestic tensions stemming from the headscarf ban and the closure case against the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) by stating, "No power can make Turkey and its secular structures pay homage." When asked about this remark following his speech, Buyukanit responded, "If there were no external influences or centers, would there still be clashes? Perhaps there would be, but not like those that are taking place now."

Basbug on Cooperation with Iran, Kurdish Language Broadcasts

¶9. (U) In response to questions at the symposium about Turkish cooperation with Iran against the PKK, General Basbug, who will likely succeed Buyukanit as TGS Chief in

August, reportedly said, "We hit (the PKK) in coordination with Iran. When needed, we will do it again. We are sharing intelligence with Iran."

¶10. (U) Basbug reportedly endorsed Kurdish language TV broadcasting which the Turkish parliament is in the process of authorizing, stating that if official Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) broadcasts can break the influence of other "influential broadcasts" (i.e. Kurdish-language Roj TV from Denmark), then it "certainly will be useful."

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